TL1217

# IFET PARTICIPATES IN ASIA-PACIFIC CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, IS EXCLUDED FROM UN ASIAN REGIONAL PRECONFERENCE

IFET applies to attend Bangkok preconference:

Considering the importance of the upcoming Vienna Conference and the fact that a number of IFET member groups are located in Europe, the IFET secretariat went to great pains to try to secure accreditation to the second UN World Conference on Human Rights, should groups wish to officially attend. For this it was necessary to participate in the Asian Regional Preconference in Bangkok (March 29-April 2) and the secretariat applied to the coordinator, Mr. John Pace of the UN Centre for Human Rights, in January. Since IFET is not affiliated with ECOSOC, under the rules, as a "category B group" it was subject to review by the countries of the Asian region. One of the countries, Indonesia, objected.
The secretariat was informed of this through the courtesy of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Ministry invited the secretariat to respond to the objections and offered to convey the response to the Indonesian authority concerned. (See enclosed materials) Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry made clear that, for its part, it had supported IFET's participation and had officially notified the Conference coordinator that it hoped to see all NGOs from Japan accredited. (We learned in Bangkok that the Japanese Govt. went even further and told the UN Centre for Human Rights that there were "no grounds" for Indonesia's objections to IFET.) However, in spite of repeated inquiries, IFET had received no reply whatsoever when Kiyoko Furusawa and Jean Inglis left for Bangkok. (A telegram informing IFET of its rejection reached Kure on Mar 25.)

(Note: The mention of the Free East Timor Japan Coalition in Indonesia's objection was a mystery to us, as FETJC had not applied in the first place. The mystery was cleared up in Bangkok by Mr. Pace, who explained to the NGO conference and press corps that the Centre had compiled its own list of NGOs in the region, culled from various sources, and this list, not a list of actual applicants, was what was presented to the governments. Thirty NGOs in all were nixed, including IFET and FETJC.

East Timor Prominent at NGO Conference

At the Asia Pacific Human Rights Conference (March 25-28) that preceded the UN Conference, over one hundred human rights activists from the region discussed common concerns and strategized to maximize their impact on the UN conferences. The level of committment, cooperation, solidarity was very high. Siswa Santoso, an Indonesian activist based in Holland, joined the Steering Committee, another of our team, the Drafting Comm. Catherine Scott of CIIR liaised with the Korean Group, etc. The number of old friends with whom we interacted in very creative ways is too long to mention. Just as important, we made many new friends and familiarized ourselves with vital trends and issues in the region we were not sufficiently aware of.

The presence of CNRM representative Jose Ramos Horta was made the most of by the organizers and the press. (Bangkok's English dailies, The Nation and The Bangkok Post, cover the East Timor issue very faithfully!) The Conference identified East Timor, along with Cambodia, Burma and Bhutan, as areas around which solidarity actions were deemed particularly urgent. IFET distributed a modest paper, "The UN and East Timor--Why Won't the System Work?" on the first day. The next day we were amazed to see it (enclosed) reproduced on the Ed-Op page of The Nation!

IFET Exclusion Becomes Big Issue:

Many NGOs expressed their concern over IFET's exclusion from the UN conference. The organizers invited UN conference coordinators to the NGO conference on the last day, and Mr. Pace and UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, Ibrahim Fall, were questioned by both NGOs and the press on IFET's exclusion. (IFET's press release enclosed.) Mr. Pace explained the rejection thus: One country of the region objected to, and one country supported IFET. The situation was such that the Centre felt that if it accredited IFET, the country that objected would have walked out of the Conference. "We were faced with two bad choices, and this is the bad choice that we made." Mr. Pace assured us that we would be able to participate under the aegis of any other NGO. Mr. Fall, as if to show that the UN wasn't abandoning East Timor(?!), told the group that the Secretary General's representative, Amos Wako, would be visiting the territory at the end of March. (Besides this meeting with Fall, Ramos-Horta and other East Timor-related people met with the Undersecretary on April 1 as well.)
The IFET issue not only got a lot of press, but the UN Centre staff were bombarded from many sides on its exclusion. I believe that all the fuss served not only to highlight the East Timor issue, but also sent a message to the UN and governments in the region that exclusion is a self-defeating measure.

The UN Conference

The UN Conference from March 29 opened with an encouraging address by the Thai Prime Minister. (Many times at Bangkok, we were reminded what a difference a bit of democracy in one country makes for solidarity-building in the region!) Then came the heavies like Indonesia's Wiryono, who lashed out at those who use "human rights as a pretext for waging a political campaign against another country" (See enclosed "Asian States Warned..."article). A bit up tight, maybe?

NGOs were allowed five minutes each for statements; mention of any specific country or territory in the statements was forbidden. First came our NGO's "Bangkok Declaration", underlining the universality of human rights; indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; group and collective rights, (women, children, minorities, indigenous people, workers); the problems of sexual abuse and sexual slavery; militarization;

refugees and displaced persons; torture, disappearances and political prisoners; self-determination; freedom of expression; democracy; independence of the judiciary. etc.. Amnesty, IJC, and other NGOs large and small made exellent presentations.

The NGO "Bangkok Declaration" stated, inter alia, that "We commit ourselves to international solidarity and to voice the concerns of our brothers and sisters without boundaries and barriers." IFET experienced this solidarity in all our encounters in Bangkok. Kiyoko and I were adopted by a Korean NGO in order to attend the UN Conference, and it was this group, Korean NGO's Network for the UN World Conference on Human Rights, that presented a statement reflecting concern over the East Timor issue. Cho, Yong Whan drafted the statement (enclosed) and it was read out on March 30 by Kim Sung-Tae of International Korean Alliance for Peace and Democracy. (Mr. Kim is a Korean student in Australia and friend of Kamal Bamadhaj (massacred at Santa Cruz)).

In summary, those of us who attended the two conferences in Bangkok were extremely impressed with the way NGOs are working together and also greatly encouraged to see the understanding and goodwill with respect to the East Timor issue that exists. Whether there is the same level of understanding among the NGOs in the African and Latin American groupings I am not in a position to say, but I hope that the momentum with respect to East Timor that was generated in Bangkok will not be wasted but will spill over in Vienna and "infect" any regional groupings which may not be sufficiently aware. The scale of the Vienna conferences will be much larger, however, so it will be important to have as many people and groups working there as possible.

Vienna is Next:

In response to an IFET questionnaire, only one group, IEPALA (Spain), said it was planning to attend the Vienna World Conference. May I encourage others of you to attend. A large contingent of East Timorese from Portugal is expected tp participate in parallel activities, give cultural presentations, etc. For information, in addition to the NGO Forum coordinating group in Vienna (refer to my previous mailing), you may also contact Ms Celine Moore of the International Service for Human Rights in Geneva (tel: 41-22-733-5123).

(Attached is a list of suggestions by Kiyoko Furusawa for areas of input that you might consider based on focuses that emerged out of the Bangkok NGO conference.)

Report by Jean Inglis, IFET secretariat, Kure, Japan (Fax: 81-823-22-2684)
Kiyoko Furusawa (Fax: 81-6-370-8314)

# Suggestions for Vienna

Link up with Projects by NGOs from the Bangkok Conference. Three Examples:

Campaign on Sexual Slavery/ Sexual Violence by the Military (Presently involving Korean and Philippine Women who were forced to become "comfort women" for Japanese Soldiers during the Pacific War). Could Peace is Possible in East Timor make a brochure about East Timorese Women being sexually abused by the Indonesian military, etc.? The coordinator for this campaign is Ms Nelia Sancho Liao, Asian Women Human Rights Council(AWHRC). Tel:632-921-5571/ FAX:632-999-437 (Quezon City, Philippines)

Campaign on Torture: The NGOs working on the torture issue are planning to jointly have a room at the Vienna conference where they will have exhibits, videos, seminars, etc. on torture and rehabilitation for torture victims. Could anybody help facilitate the participation of East Timorese torture victims? The coordinator is Dr. Mahboob Mebdi, Voice Against Torture Tel: 92-51-256-882/ FAX: 92-51-856-763, or IRCT: International Council for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (Denmark) (Dr. Mebdi would also like someone working on torture rehabilitation in East Timor to come to an international seminar in Islamabad in May. Can you suggest someone?)

Campaign on Security Laws: There are at least ten countries in Asia that have security laws like Korea's National Security Law, and there will be exhibits and seminars on this issue at Vienna. Shouldn't we be making an input with Indonesia's anti-subversion law, etc.? Any group with specialized knowledge on this please contact the coordinator, Mr. Chun, Jung Bae, Korean NGOs Network for the UN World Conference on Human Rights, FAX: 82-2-522-8117 or Catherine Scott at CIIR (Tel: 44-71-354-0883/FAX: 44-71-359-0017)

Take Papers for Distribution and/or Official Presentation

IFET took a very basic paper on East Timor and the UN to Bangkok, but there is need for more specialized papers at Vienna on themes such as the following: (Remember that papers submitted at the UN meeting are not allowed to mention specific regions. For distribution otherwise, mention of East Timor, etc. is of course advisable.)

Denial of social, economic and cultural rights resulting from the

violation of civil and political rights

Development under foreign occupation

(These themes are important in order to expose the vacuuity of Indonesia's pet theme: the right to development has priority.)

Militarization

The rights of women, children, peasants, workers, internally displaced persons...

Other Comments: There was not sufficient discussion at the Bangkok NGO meeting on the issue of economic aid sanctions, a pity, given the prominent place this has in the rhetoric of countries like Indonesia.. If any of you can take a good position paper for lobbying, interaction among groups in Vienna, you may be able to make a much needed contribution to the whole process in Vienna. Another area (and related, don't you think?) that was neglected in Bangkok was the relationship of arms sales and human rights. Timor-related activists/scholars etc. should provide leadership on this question!

Miscellaneous

A suggestion for French groups: contact Ms Keiko Shingo, a Japanese familiar with the East Timor issue who is working with the West Sahara solidarity group in Paris to plan a joint event.

Don't neglect work with Palestinian activists (IFET worked with the Palestinians in Bangkok in drawing up the "Joint Statement on Self- determination" presented at the UN Conference). Indonesia is actively wooing the Palestinians, so we should not forget to keep in close contact.
(Ms Randa Atallah Siniora, Palestinian Organization for Hu;man Rights, Tel:972-2-956421/FAX:972-2-955194; Mr. Simon Award, Palestine Human Rights Information Center, Jerusalem FAX: 972-287070)

Note: Although a number of Indonesian NGOs were accredited for the Bangkok conference, none came. Does this mean there will be no Indonesian NGOs at Vienna????